

Sleeping Valley

Chapter 3

River rushes like their namesake into the open doors of the library as Haven looks up in awe at glowing lanterns hanging from the ceiling. Vines with small blossoms twirl around the many bookshelves of the rooms. Cushions and pillows lay on the floor for animals to rest on, and a fireplace in the wall lights the main room in a warm glow. In the center is a directory. Lumi rests her paws on it, tracing her fingers over the raised letters to process it fully.

“Okay, so the section on magic is...” After a while of reading through each section of the library, she realizes there is no single section for magic. Her fluffy tail droops on the floor as she thinks.

“Maybe we should split up to search the library,” Basil suggests.

“Oh yeah, good idea!” Lumi purrs, “How about I go straight, Haven, you go right, and Basil, you go left?”

“What about River?” The wolfdog asks.

Haven chuckles in reply, “I think they’ll be fine.” The three watch as River scurries throughout the library, searching nearly every title with a beaming smile.

Basil walks down a hall lined with bookshelves towering up to the ceiling. He traces a paw along the book binds on his search for answers. He eventually comes across the paststory section as it is illuminated by the light of the fireplace.

One book that catches his attention is titled “Celestials – The Creation of Peace”. He picks it up and sits down on a pillow, resting his cane beside him. The fireplace warmly crackles as he flips through the book. Eventually he finds a section that piques his interest.

“Oh, guys, I think I found something!” Basil calls out, his tail wagging. A sheep nearby shushes him. “Oops, sorry,” he whispers in response as his friends join him.

“What is it?” River asks, peeking over Basil’s shoulder.

“It says here that when the celestials created the oak, they needed the help of some normal animals.”

“Does it say what they did to help? Did they use magic?” Lumi asks.

Basil slowly focuses on the words with his paws, “Yes, they did! I think they used rune stones to create their own forms of magic.”

Haven reads along with him. “It says the rune stones grew in the Snowy Peak Mountains, I wonder if they’re still there.” She points to an illustration of colorful crystal shards with writing etched into them. Basil flips

a few pages to a map, raised lines show different sections of land with textures indicating the biomes.

“Okay, so we’re at the Overgrown Oak,” he points to the center of the map, then traces his paw north, across a river and through a forest to a mountainous range labeled Snowy Peak.

“It’ll probably take at least a day to get there,” River muses, taking in the map, “We should pack some supplies.”

“Do you want to split up and meet back at the oak?” Lumi’s tail flicks in anticipation. Haven nods, “Good idea.”

On the way home, Lumi lets Haven know she’ll be back after visiting her parents. Her partner nods then turns, entering the hill. *I have to let them know, I hope they won’t be too worried...*

The brown and cream cat knocks on the door of her childhood home, a small, hearty house tucked into the edge of Soft Wood village. Her feet on the smooth dirt path remind her of home. She is greeted by warm hugs and smiles. Once Lumi notifies her parents of the news, they both turn to each other for a moment, trying to process everything.

“Wow, my light... This is a lot to process.” Her mother, Chime, stirs a cup of coffee while the three of them sit around a table. Opal, her parent, puts one paw on Lumi’s.

“Yes, it is,” The white, speckled cat thinks for a moment. “But I’m glad you seem to be taking this well, darling.” They run their other paw through Lumi’s hair. *I wish I believed that*, she doubts herself with a light sigh.

“Opal means it, and I agree,” Chime seems to read her mind, “I may not fully understand this threat just yet, but I know you and your friends can handle it.” Her partner nods.

How do you know that? What if we’re all going about this the wrong way? “Yeah,” Lumi simply replies.

Chime chuckles softly, “Lumi, I think you may be the only animal I know to worry about the possibility of nothing going wrong.” She places her coffee cup on the table. While looking down at her trembling paws, Lumi tries to hold back the energy starting to bubble inside her. In desperation, she glances at the window beside her then stiffly stands up.

“I’m sorry, I have to go now. My friends are waiting for me,” Lumi blinks back the tears forming in her eyes. Before she can turn to leave, Chime gently grabs her paw.

“Lumi, wait.” The orange cat mews in concern. Her daughter closes her eyes tightly. “You can be honest with us, you don’t have to put on a brave face. You know that, right?” When Lumi hears the warm purr of Chime’s tone, she is suddenly a kitten again, clinging to her mother who grooms her hair gently. Her stiffness melts under Chime’s embrace and her eyes slightly water.

“Mama, I’m scared. How do I know I’m doing the right thing? What if none of this is even real?”

Opal rests a paw on her shoulder. “If this threat isn’t real, that would be great. But if it is, I know you will be able to fight it. You and your friends are kind and intelligent, the animals I would trust most to handle this.”

“Really?” Lumi sniffs and turns to them, they nod.

“Yes, really. Remember that time as a kitten you fought off a bully who was picking on Basil?”

“Well, I was only sticking up for him—”

“Or the time you helped our neighbor’s calf who got stuck in a tree?”

“Okay, fine!” Lumi giggles her tears away. “Thank you,” She hugs her parents tightly as light shines throughout the living room. Their purrs make the room gently vibrate with warmth.

“Now I actually have to get going now,” Lumi apologetically smiles.

Opal's ears droop while they wear a calm smile, "Aww, I was just about to make lunch."

"I'm sorry, I just don't want my friends to wait around for me..."

"It's okay," Chime responds as she raises her tail, "We believe in you! Please come back to visit soon."

Lumi nods with a smile, "I will! We should only be gone a few days, and hopefully by then we'll have more information." She tightly hugs both of her parents goodbye before setting off to the Overgrown Oak.

Lumi bounds through morning mist down a hillside and finds her friends near the base of the oak. Around them, the oak begins to bustle with activity. Sellers set up their carts for the day while animals chatter about their plans. Basil waves to her eagerly when she spots the group.

"Hey, Lumi! How'd it go?" The brown wolfdog asks.

"It went well," *It's probably best he doesn't know I'm nervous about it.* "My parents are both supportive of it." Basil gives her a cheerful pat on the back.

"Don't worry, we've got this." He looks at her with a knowing smile. *Of course he knows me better than that,* she thinks with a light laugh.

"I'm glad it went well, I packed some stuff for the day's travel," Haven holds up the bag slung over her shoulder.

“Did you meet up with your family to tell them about it?” Lumi asks as Haven puts some items into her backpack.

“Nah, that’s not really necessary,” Haven replies awkwardly. *Oh right, she probably didn’t want to tell them about it.*

“If we’re all ready, should we get going now?” River swishes their fluffy tail in anticipation, the others nod. “Basil, which direction do we head in?” The gray fox turns to Basil as he flips through the book he found earlier.

“If we head north through the Willow Forest, we should get to the Snowy Peak Mountains by tomorrow morning.”

“Great, let’s go.” Haven walks ahead of the group, taking confident strides. Lumi smiles at her and takes in the scents of fresh baked bread and animals chatting together. *I’ll do everything I can to protect this*, she thinks as she follows her friends out of the energetic abode into the dense woods.